

Remarks by
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Blessing of the Fleet
U.S. Navy Memorial
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Be Strong and of Good Courage

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor and a privilege to represent the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vern Clark, here today. I've always enjoyed every visit to this magnificent Memorial, a splendid tribute to the men and women who throughout our Navy's history have gone down to the sea in ships. And today is no exception.

Every official asked to speak here at the Navy Memorial does so with a sense of humility. The sacrifices of those honored here, comrades in arms no longer with us, have written a memorable chapter in the book of dignity and courage.

Today's "Blessing of the Fleet" ceremony, concomitant with a tribute to the Destroyer Centennial inside the museum, is an occasion of more than just symbolic importance.

Historians of the American experience have often pointed out that the scriptures have had a major influence on the Founding Fathers. The Bible can truly be said to be one of the roots that nourishes our civilization. I like to think that the proper defense policy for this nation also has Biblical roots, not in Napoleon's dictum that God is on the side of the strongest battalions, but rather in the Biblical injunction, "Be strong and of good courage."

The values of "strength" and "courage" are particularly celebrated here at the Navy Memorial. Being "strong" means to create and sustain the capabilities for self-defense. To "be of good courage" is to possess the self-respect essential to the defense of the values we hold dear.

This Memorial is testimonial to the audacity, bravery and sacrifice of those that have gone before us. Many of those honored here belong to what we call today the "Greatest Generation," but I would submit that this generation is about to have company.

For we are living in a nearly unique era in our nation's history. Perhaps at no time since the end of World War II have the American people appreciated what those that proudly wear the uniform are all about.

And for those of you here today who remember Pearl Harbor...Normandy...Iwo Jima...and for all of us for whom September 11th will always be, along with December 7th, a "Day of Infamy," I want to assure you: Wherever the United States Navy operates,

from the deep waters of the world's oceans to more shallow waters in land's shadow, forward deployed or defending the homeland, we will convey two messages: This nation's unshakeable resolve not to be intimidated by those that would wish us ill...and our capability to fight and win if that is what is required.

Today more than 30,000 men and women wearing navy blue are at sea. Almost one-third of the entire fleet is deployed, including 30 ships operating in the Red and North Arabian Seas and the Arabian Gulf in support of the ongoing War Against Terror.

And lest we forget, seven months ago, the Navy provided the initial decisive response to the erupting crisis, providing our national leadership with important options where none would have otherwise existed.

On September 11th, aircraft carrier ENTERPRISE was returning to the States from operations in the Arabian Gulf when satellite television provided tragic images of deadly attacks at home half a world away. Within moments, the carrier's rudder swept over, and using the forward presence and mobility unique to naval forces, the ship and its accompanying body of cruisers, destroyers and frigates headed back to the Arabian Sea. By the next morning, ENTERPRISE was within reach of Afghanistan, ready to launch sustained precision strikes against an enemy hundreds of miles away.

ENTERPRISE and her escorts were not alone for long. Two additional Carrier Battle Groups, led by CARL VINSON enroute from California, and KITTY HAWK based out of Japan, arrived shortly thereafter. The Sailors and Marines of the Amphibious Ready Group centered on assault ship PELELIU, cut short a port visit to Australia and sailed north towards the Arabian Sea. Cruisers, destroyers and submarines operating with all three carriers prepared Tomahawk missiles for long-range strikes.

At home, carriers GEORGE WASHINGTON and JOHN C. STENNIS took station off the East and West Coasts. More than a dozen cruisers and destroyers put to sea, commencing operations to secure the air and sea approaches to America's shores.

In the weeks following September 11th, naval forces led the way. In a superbly executed choreography of air, sea and ground power, Tomahawk shooters suppressed enemy air defenses while carrier strike packages flew hundreds of miles beyond the sea. In combination with Marines conducting the longest force insertion in their remarkable history, and Special Forces and Air Force fighters and bombers, along with Navy jets, conducting air-to-ground strikes unprecedented in accuracy and lethality, the enemy's will to fight was destroyed.

But the campaign in Central Asia, and the War Against Terror, continues. To date, nearly 60 ships have participated in *Operation Enduring Freedom* and over 9,000 Navy sorties have been flown over Afghanistan, many in conjunction with Air Force assets. Sustained from the sea, Marines, Soldiers, Seabees and Special Operations Forces from all of America's armed services, as well as our allies at sea, in the air, and on land,

from a host of countries united in the War Against Terror, have worked with local Afghan forces to free their land from the Taliban regime and al Qaeda terrorist network.

Our Navy's response to the events of September 11th is testimonial to the dedicated service of our active and reserve Sailors, and our Marine and civilian shipmates in the Department of the Navy. Events since that terrible day have served, as none since the Korean War, to emphasize the mobility, lethality and reach of our naval forces.

But most importantly, it has shown the dedication of this generation of Sailors and Marines, indeed all our men and women in uniform today, to mission accomplishment. We stand together, united...ready to fight...and win...and we will!

At the same time we are truly fortunate to have national leadership that understands the incalculable cost of war in terms of human sorrow and suffering. For above all others, national defense is the first and most vital of government services. If the government cannot, as the Constitution charges, "provide for the common defense," it can provide for nothing else. To the question of whether we can afford both economic progress and a capable defense, our answer must be to succeed at both or we shall surely succeed at neither.

Just as important as the tangible factor, the ships, planes and submarines, are the intangible factors such as the nation's morale and the spirit of its people. In both deterrence and crisis, capabilities count, but a nation's will counts even more. Our great power will be useless, our alliances unreliable, and our adversaries unafraid to challenge our interests, if we are believed to lack the moral fibre to defend our values.

While the issue might once have given pause, the world is beginning to realize that there is a new strength of will in America, a desire to face our adversaries, those that would do us harm, from a position of strength and determination. America is now showing the world that it has what it takes to win the War Against Terror.

Theodore Roosevelt's words, written at the dawn of the last century, still ring true a hundred years later: "A great free peoples owes it to itself and to all mankind not to sink into helplessness before the powers of evil. We live in a free country only because our forefathers were willing to wage war rather than accept a peace that spells destruction."

This magnificent Memorial speaks to the sacrifices of those forefathers, but also to the bright promise of our own future. Caught up in the urgency of the moment, it is oftentimes hard to remember that events long past were once in our future. History is not predictable, but gives us the power to contrast, and the right to estimate, what our future will be. Even after final victory in Europe and the Pacific, the enormity of America's accomplishment in the 1940's was not apparent for decades. Now that we have the distance, it is easy to see the true greatness of the people of that era.

Yet today, while still in the shadow of the greatest tragedy to befall our shores since the American Civil War, we can sense in America's adversity...an inner strength... that has been rekindled. The spirit and traditions of service and sacrifice that made our nation great, which we celebrate at this magnificent Memorial, have been born anew. The strength to face evil, the courage to stand against the brutal logic of terror, is resident in our Sailors and Marines today, and I believe, in American society at large.

We have the leadership, the combat capabilities, and most importantly, the spirit in our men and women in today's Navy, which have made this country great...and will continue to do so in the new century before us.

We are here today in this great shrine that commemorates the world's greatest Navy...in continued service to the world's greatest nation. Like our forefathers of the "Greatest Generation," our vision is clear, and we are confident in our ultimate success.

"Be strong and of good courage." A legacy from past heroes, a watchword for those that go down to the sea in ships today. It is this continuity of purpose, our history and our tradition, that is worthy of celebration in today's "Blessing of the Fleet" ceremony.

Thank you for sharing it with me.

“On or About”
06 April
in
United States Naval History

- 04 April 1776 U.S. Navy ship COLUMBUS fires on British schooner HAWK marking first engagement of U.S. Navy with an enemy warship.
- 06 April 1862 Surface fire support from the gunboat LEXINGTON operating in the Tennessee River is instrumental in stemming the Confederate advance on the first day of the Battle of Shiloh.**
- 07 April 1905 U.S. Ambassador to France discovers the body of John Paul Jones in an abandoned Protestant cemetery in Paris.
- 06 April 1909 Commander Robert E. Peary is the first man to reach the North Pole, where he raises the American flag.**
- 06 April 1917 U.S. Congress approves Declaration of War against Germany. Strength of the Navy at this time: 4,376 officers, 69,680 men**
- 10 April 1941 Destroyer NIBLACK (DD 424) depth charges German U-Boat. First hostile action taken by American naval vessel against Axis Powers.
- 06 April 1945 Operation TEN-GO, Japanese massed air attack on U.S. naval forces off Okinawa. 355 kamikazes attack, three destroyers sunk and four damaged so badly they have to be scraped**
- 07 April 1945 In the Battle of East China Sea, the Japanese super battleship YAMATO, in the last sortie of Japanese Imperial Navy, is sunk.
- 05-14 April 1946 Battleship MISSOURI calls in Turkey and Greece, checking Soviet expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- 04 April 1949 NATO established
- 13 April 1960 U.S. Navy’s first navigational satellite launched from Cape Canaveral.
- 08 April 1968 Battleship NEW JERSEY recommissioned.

